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- ART. IV. — 1. *The Wide, Wide World*. By ELIZABETH WETHERELL. New York: G. P. Putnam. 1851. 2 vols. 12mo.
 2. *Queechy*. By ELIZABETH WETHERELL. New York: G. P. Putnam. 1852. 2 vols. 12mo.
 3. *Dollars and Cents*. By AMY LOTHROP. New York: G. P. Putnam. 1852. 2 vols. 12mo.

WHAT would be the astonishment of Mrs. Anne Radcliffe and Mrs. Charlotte Smith, if they could revisit the glimpses of the moon they were so fond of, and remain long enough among us of the nineteenth century to read a fair specimen of the literature of the day! How would the exalted imaginations, which conceived *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Castle*, accept the information that elegant sorrows no longer command sympathy; that the tender trials of Lord Algernon and Lady Helena are voted "flat," while pecuniary hinderances to the union of John and Sarah alone touch the feelings of a discerning public? Of all the fictions now in favor with that public, which would they find most tolerable or least intolerable,—the philosophical, political, sectarian, or philanthropic novels; or those of unstinted bloodshed, or those which are essentially essays on the condition of the poor, with hardly a film of fiction to soften the sharp outline?

We can form some notion of the perplexity and vexation of these excellent ladies, by recurring to a private experience still fresh in our memory. We were returning northward from a survey of the galleries of Italy, where Art has been the handmaid of beauty, elegance, and grandeur, till it seems to the delighted traveller vexing and vulgar to be obliged to devote part of every precious day to eating and sleeping,—into Holland, where the exquisite skill of Teniers and his compeers has been expended upon objects so mean and unpleasing that, if they came in our way in real life, the first thought would be a speedy retreat. To exchange the Transfiguration for Boors drinking—the Madonna della Seggiola for Paul Potter's Bull—the Apollo for the Subject for Dissection,—what perfection of execution could console us? Nay, the very perfection with which these mean and graceless things are

rendered, added to our vexation in contemplating them, for it was just so much deducted from the illustration of the true and ennobling realm of Art.

We would, by no means, be understood to say that there is no other side from which to approach this subject; but only that we must own to a good deal of sympathy with such feelings as we have ventured to ascribe to the illustrious *revenants* aforesaid. In their day, it had not yet become the fashion to draw conclusions as to national character from popular literature. Novels were not then supposed to express the spirit of the age. Their aim was to please the reader, insinuating a little instruction in morals meantime, and sometimes venturing upon satire, either general or particular, prompted by public ills or private resentment. Low life in them was either picturesque or brutal; poverty made angels or demons; and riches were the proper and certain reward of virtue, as well as the crowning grace of beauty. The romance proper dealt only with an ideal world; which, though it borrowed terrors and motives from this lower, every-day sphere, yet made them all its own by a judicious mixture of elegance and absurdity. One returned from its illusions to humdrum, common-sense life and duty, as we come out of a panorama exhibited by gas-light, to the sunny street and jostling crowd, — uncertain at first which is the false and which the true. To have let in the cool daylight upon the show, would have been to kill it completely — an ungrateful recompense for so much pleasure. Nowadays, every thing that will not bear this disenchanting light is ranked as meretricious; there is no truth but literal truth; heroines are no longer “mad in white satin”; troubles, to touch our hearts, must be every-day troubles; heroes, who do not interest themselves in political economy and the condition of the masses, are unworthy of good fortune. Instead of dealing with thrilling adventures, delicate shades of character, and love deferred by incredibly fiendish machinations, fiction now attacks the factory system; the Herodian schools, — as some wit has denominated those which murder, or even half murder, the “Innocents”; — the governess grievance, or the Court of Chancery; — using individual character and for-

tunes as mere machinery for the development of the leading idea. The novel has become a *quatrième état*; something considerable in government; a power formidable to evil-doers; but not particularly lovely or cheering to those who resort to it merely to delight or to exalt the imagination, — as suggestive of possibilities of happiness, or as counter-agent to the disenchanting tendencies of our wayward, blundering experience.

How far back shall we date this revolution? Miss Burney was a phoenix in her way, a marvel of adventurous naturalness for those times; but she called in the aid of rank and wealth, and depended not a little on the dazzle of high life. She was carefully genteel, and handled her low characters as with a pair of tongs, — as a fashionable physician of somewhere near her era is said to have felt the pulses of his poor patients with his cane. Mrs. Opie had a more comprehensive view of human nature, and a more general interest in it. She was a Quaker, and had never been a Maid of Honor. Religion and worldly wisdom were aptly blended in her agreeable novels; stylish follies were hit off, and many a social fallacy shown up by side-lights. Her *Illustrations of Lying* held “the mirror up to nature” to some purpose, and many were the conscious blushes it reflected. But we can hardly consider those easy, pleasant stories as ancestors of the trenchant novel of to-day.

Miss Edgeworth, in her half-didactic fictions, pictured high life as at home and low life as from above — a birds-eye or celestial view; and with her potent educational instincts, drew after her a mighty audience of parents and children, with a moderate following of young men and maidens. But the great public was not, could not be, hers. She held a ferule; she carefully maintained an aristocratic bearing, that warned the reader to remember the distinction between the writer and her more natural characters. She wrote to instruct the docile public in certain things, and not for the humble purpose of pleasing; yet she scorned not the aid of romance, and often made rather awkward efforts in that direction. But there was a fatal defect in her wing. She owned (in her books) no deity but Common Sense,

and Common Sense never yet touched the affections of mankind, or warmed the common heart into a sweet and holy forgetfulness of self. Honor to Miss Edgeworth for what she did! what she did not do, she did not try to do. Her novels were almost as much school-books, as those excellent lessons entitled *Frank and Rosamond*. Her teachings were direct and specific. She let the heart wholly alone, and contented herself with prescribing for the conduct. With Life, as a problem, she had nothing to do; it had not then begun to be called a problem. Its particular emergencies were to be dealt with by particular expedients, within the domain and potency of Common Sense; it was to be conquered, like Captain Bobadil's army, in detail. For want of a whiter or drier light than worldly experience or worldly wisdom can lend, even Miss Edgeworth's sagacity did not make the discovery that it cannot be so conquered. She did not perceive, that, if every one of her excellent precepts and hints had been adopted and acted upon, there would still have remained a world of evils untouched, of deadly faults uncared for. A social fabric built upon her plan might not have fallen to pieces before the blasts of fortune, or sunk by the slow undermining of folly or fraud. It might be fair to look upon, and available for most purposes of convenience; but it must ever lack the breath of life from heaven, and the direct, creative, vivifying beams of that Sun of Righteousness, without whose influence the heart of erring man is cold and hard as polar ice. How different that glorious edifice, all whose parts and dependencies, from polished corner-stone to dazzling pinnacle, are fitly joined together, each with each and all, "whose builder and maker is God!"

The illusions of old romance were, for a time, revived, while the splendid magic of Scott ruled the hour. Pageant and tournament, presence-chamber and battle-field, dizzy turret and fell *oubliette*, imprisoned the willing imagination in turn, while over all alike, hovered the sweet spirit of Humanity, and, not far in the background, beamed the hallowed face of Religion, consecrating our pleasure. O, those were happy days for readers! But the wondrous potentate resigned the throne, and left no successor. In the collapse of fancy that

followed that period of enchantment, Miss Ferrier and Miss Austen tried the power of every-day life and every-day character to interest the general heart. The sensible and amusing novels of these ladies are the product of much knowledge of society, and sharp, though not ill-natured, observations of its motives and pretences. They show up ordinary human nature under the modification of silk and broadcloth, ermine and epaulettes; and they do it well. We laugh at foibles or frown at meannesses; perhaps, resolve to beware of the one and the other. So far, well enough. But what is our feeling toward the social world thus exhibited? Is our love of kind increased? Are the Christian desire and duty of remedying the ills we see, quickened by these pictures of prevalent heartlessness and folly? Causes are no more indicated than remedies are suggested. The worldly view of corrupt and hollow social life is, simply, that such things are, and being so, must so remain,—the work of the satirist, and the legitimate object of ridicule, certainly, but a subject of effort to none but the inveterate Utopian. This remark applies generally to what are called novels of real life, the scene of which is laid in England. We have called this class of novels amusing, and so they are, if we do not look at them too seriously. They quicken the worldly discernment, help us to self-knowledge, and suggest toleration of things as they are. But it is a philosophic and Epicurean, not a religious, toleration. This would be no subject of complaint, if the novel limited its pretensions to amusing the reader. It is only when it undertakes the office of a moral engine, that we begin to test the springs or inquire into the principle. A puppet-show is safe enough; but a locomotive—

Bulwer we must consider as belonging to the school of romance, with its glories, its sweetening influences, its soft illusions. As far as he is distinctive and individual, it is in this direction. And because of this, we should have looked on him as a benefactor to his age, if he had been as pure as he was graceful and attractive in his fictions. But, until the Caxtons, almost every one of his numerous romances had some plague-spot about it, and should have been banished to the moral Lazaretto. Now that he seems to have found

some root of healing, we gladly accord him an honorable place among those who have increased "the public stock of harmless pleasure."

We are not about to run a tilt as the advocates of the religious novel, especially in its old, sectarian form—a form which, unhappily, is not wholly disused in our own day. But pictures, however attractive, of life disjoined from the influence of that religion which is its salt and savor, or forgetful of the great fact that human virtue can possess neither consistency nor stability without it, are like the crude efforts of the tyro on canvas, who, being endowed with a certain amount of observation and an eye for color, produces glowing and even fascinating figures and groups which, on examination, prove to be monsters—inasmuch as, under all their life-like hues and effects of beauty, they have bones and muscles placed according to fancy, rather than in agreement with nature and science. Such pictures may indeed please the youthful eye, but they would terribly mislead the student who should depend on them as models. Better, far, the angels of Art's early day, with lovely heads but empty drapery—terminating *in aria*, from a pious dread of ascribing human proportions to superhuman beings; or the equally ideal heroines of the old romances, strong only in beauty, yet subject to no weakness but love;—moral monsters, indeed, but having at least such religion as can be incorporated with such natures.

It were folly to deny that the novel has become more *respectable* in its modern form; we say only that it is less *pleasing*. It has not attempted to stem the utilitarian current of the time, like painting and sculpture, and music—(would we could add poetry, but that, alas! has become didactic, in order that it may be read)—Painting, Sculpture, and Music—blessings on them for standing proudly up, unmodified by all the press of world-tendencies—unaccommodated to the encroachments of vulgarity, however specious or popular—faithful witnesses to the high uses of Beauty! Fiction has confessed its inferiority as an art; it has sought not to lead, but to follow; not to inspire, but to persuade. It no longer claims to have an end within itself; it labors, and to an ultimate purpose. It has not only become a schoolmaster, but a

treacherous one; one who puts on a forced, cruel smile, to entice his victim, while he holds the rod behind his back, only waiting an unguarded moment to assume his natural look and his favorite office. But this office is very *respectable*, both in the book and in the schoolmaster, if we believe the "moral-pocket-handkerchief"-makers of the day. They insist that it is a "dooty" to mix the medicine with the syrup which our simpler fathers used to reserve to sweeten the imagination and brighten up the face of the imp, who had taken the less palatable potion without resistance. For, say they, people grow more and more unwilling to swallow instruction, and will hardly take it at all, unless it is cunningly disguised. It were a grave question to ask, how has instruction become so unpalatable?

It is but carrying our thought a step further to say that, although a very large proportion of the novels of the day are written by women, yet the novel feminine is nearly extinct. Not to speak of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, of whose heroines a certain piquant ferocity, which now and then touches "the brink of all we hate," forms the principal charm,—where do we meet a novel of the first class that bears a decided and intentional feminine aspect, if we except some of the many volumes of the author of "Two Old Men's Tales," and the picturesque platitudes of Mr. James? Mrs. Gore's innumerable progeny all raise the suspicion of a maternal beard. The qualifications of our most popular lady-novelists are, not tenderness, piety, imagination, fancy; but keen observation, powerful satire, knowledge of the world, strong common sense, and — though last not least — democratic principles, of which women seem destined to be the instinctive apostles, as indeed they can well afford to be, occupying, as they do, a fixed aristocratic position in the world; born judges of a turmoil that can never reach them. Mrs. Inchbald set all the men in England weeping over her "Simple Story," a story so simple that our school-chits, nowadays, scorn to be moved by it; Miss Brontë puts all the reviewers to their trumps by a novel of morality so questionable, that good mothers are not a little in doubt whether it ought to have a place on the drawing-room table, while the light of its better part is like

steel-glints, and the music of its love like the clang of armor, Have the hearts of men,—and women,—grown harder than of old?

Novels of American life have thus far been rather picturesque than moral or “knowing.” The new circumstances of our position, and the feeling that our country is too little known to other countries, have prompted a descriptive tone—both as to scenery and manners—an appearance of the attempt to give information—which has almost put them out of the pale of fiction and within that of travels. When Scott describes manners and customs, scenery, or historic characters, he does so because they are in themselves worth describing; they are curious, or quaint, or striking, or they have the points which fit them to be the components of a great picture in which the imagination shall find delight; when Mr. Cooper or Miss Sedgwick brings them forward, it is because they are American—new, unknown beyond our own borders, and because they *ought* to be interesting;—Indians, for instance, which writers *will* occasionally fancy they can *make* interesting, the true Indian, truly depicted, being about as interesting as the Patagonian or New Zealander. To teach morals has been no very direct aim of our indigenous novels. They have breathed a high and pure tone, but it has been an under-tone. Mr. Cooper, in his latter days, wrote some hard, blunt satires, under the guise of novels; but there is many a deposition that deserves the name better. Miss Sedgwick’s minor fictions are parables, excellent ones, adorned with all the humane graces, and distinctly American; beaming all over with the earnest goodness of the author—her truth, her courage, her religious spirit; but hardly novels.

As our space will not allow a *catalogue raisonnée* of American novels, we must content ourselves with this mere reference to them. It is more to our present purpose to say that they have been accepted and admired at home, and not a little noticed abroad; though, on every fresh venture, there is a cry of “American! we want something American! something distinctive; something that would not be at home anywhere else; grand as your rivers; rugged as your mountains; expansive, like your great lakes,” &c. There has

been, at times, a perfect hubbub of this sort—a very “Omnibus row,” if we may credit the critic managers of British taste :

“Folks of all sorts and of every degree ;
 Snob and Snip and haughty grandee ;
 Duchesses, Countesses, fresh from their tea ;
 And Shopmen, who only read books for a spree,
 Halloo'd and hooted and roar'd 'cross the sea,
 'Be grand ! be grand !
 Let your lites expand !
 We 'll take nothing small from so monstrous a land !”

(We hope the ghost of the lamented Ingoldsby will not haunt us for the liberty here taken with his rhymes.) Yet the bigger we tried to write, the more they said we stole their thunder. So, by general consent, and in happy hour, we gave up trying to write to please or instruct any body but ourselves ; and lo and behold, an American literature !

If we may accept as testimony the rapturous welcome of our British neighbors, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is in itself quite sufficient to establish our claim in that quarter—an incidental obligation which we owe to Mrs. Stowe, in addition to the great one of having flung the heaviest stone at Slavery in the United States. But besides the glory of this unique production, the past year has witnessed another triumph, in the welcome given to a new venture in the new path ; a welcome less enthusiastic, of course, than that accorded to the striking and masterly delineation of a social state about which the whole curiosity of the world was a-tiptoe ; but most hearty, smiling, tearful ; spontaneous, national, and untinctured by the poor pride which is unsatisfied without the recognition of outsiders. *The Wide, Wide World* struck a chord that was still vibrating when *Queechy* came to prolong the thrill ; and later in the day, a modest, younger sister, bearing the unlvely name of *Dollars and Cents*, touched the same note, though with a less potent finger. In treating of these three books, we must notice the third only incidentally, yet its merit is undeniable. It has the disadvantage of being third and not first, or even second ; and also of having appeared too soon after its elders, which it resembles too closely to hope to excite a fresh interest.

As far as we know the early history of the *Wide, Wide*

World, it was, for some time, bought to be presented to nice little girls, by parents and friends who desired to set a pleasant example of docility and self-command before those happy beginners. Elder sisters were soon found poring over the volumes, and it was very natural that mothers next should try the spell which could so enchain the more volatile spirits of the household. After this, papas were not very difficult to convert, for papas like to feel their eyes moisten, sometimes, with emotions more generous than those usually excited at the stock exchange or in the counting-room. Whether any elder brothers read, we must doubt, in the absence of direct testimony; for that class proverbially despises any thing so "slow" as pictures of domestic life; but we are much mistaken if the *Wide, Wide World*, and *Queechy*, have not been found under the pillows of sober bachelors,—pillows not unsprinkled with the sympathetic tears of those who, in broad day, manfully exult in "freedom" from the effeminate fetters of wife and children.

All this while nobody talked very loud about these simple stories. They were found on everybody's table, and lent from house to house, but they made no great figure in the newspapers or show-bills. By and by, the deliberate people who look at title-pages, noticed the magic words, "*Tenth Thousand*," "*Twelfth Thousand*," and so on; and as the publishing house was not one of those who think politic fibs profitable, inevitable conclusions began to be drawn as to the popularity of the books—conclusions to which the publisher had come long before, perhaps not without a certain surprise.

With our intuitive respect for the public fiat, we scarce feel like criticizing, in the usual terms, works which have received the unbought stamp of its hearty approval. All critical rules worth using are deduced from works thus stamped; that is to say, from works of genius; for the universal heart leaps up to none other. And as each of these must be to a certain extent original, we ought, perhaps, to consider it as instituting some new rules, of which it should itself first enjoy the advantage. We should certainly be much at a loss for any single book to which we might profitably compare these truly indigenous novels, unless we take the liberty of supposing that the *Vicar*

of Wakefield may have seemed to English readers of Goldsmith's time somewhat as these do to us — a simple transcript of country life and character, depending for interest partly on the ordinary joys and sorrows of our common humanity, partly on life-like pictures of individual loveliness and virtue, which sweeten what is homely in the accessories, and brighten scenes and fortunes that might otherwise leave on the mind a too oppressive sadness. As far as we can analyze the elements of literary popularity, that of the Vicar and that of these world-wide stories of ours rest on a somewhat similar basis, though we are far from claiming for the American tales an equality of merit. In plot they are deficient, certainly; may almost be said to have none; and in variety they fall immeasurably behind, as every picture of common life drawn by a woman necessarily must, for want of the wide experience open only to the other sex. But, even of the Vicar of Wakefield, Dr. Johnson said, "I myself did not think it would have had much success;" so difficult is it at first to discern the true merit of a life-like portrait by a master of the art. A daub strikes or disgusts at once; it is only the exquisite painter who keeps us long hovering in doubt through the subtle delicacy of his handling.

Miss Warner—who can no longer expect to find shelter under her pseudonyme of "Elizabeth Wetherell,"—sets out on her task with a religious intention—as who should not? under the injunction, "WHATEVER ye do"—yet she does not write what we have been accustomed to contemplate under the title of a religious novel. Attempting, as her main point, the development of a female character from mere childhood upward, she makes religion the decisive element, as whoever would draw from nature must do, spite of convention, fortune, amiable dispositions, happy circumstances, or strange reverses. Whosoever looks below the mere surface of things, finds that when virtue, happiness, or even prosperity is in question, religion is the ultimate disposer, though the world is slow to recognize its power over "the life that now is." In our view, Miss Warner allows it no higher than its due place, and ascribes to it no wider than its real influence. She makes her young girl passionate, though amiable, in her

temper; fond of admiration, although withheld by innate delicacy from seeking it unduly. She places her in circumstances of peculiar trial to her peculiar traits, and brings her, by careful gradations, to the state of self-governed and stable virtue which fits woman for her great office in the world; a fitness which would be impaired by the sacrifice of a single grace, or the loss of one sentiment of tenderness. To build such a character on any basis other than a religious one, would have been to fix a palace upon the shifting sands; and we have no quarrel with Miss Warner that she has not taken pains to hide her foundations, as some poor architects do. Let us see that the base is sufficient, that we may not be disturbed by fears as to the permanence of an edifice we are compelled to admire. Ellen and Fleda are reared, by their truly feminine and natural experiences, into any thing but "strong-minded women," at least if we accept Mr. Dickens's notion of that dreadful order. They are both of velvet softness; of delicate, downcast beauty; of flitting but abundant smiles, and of even too many and ready tears.

"Not learned, save in gracious household ways;
Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants."

They live in the affections, as the true woman must; yet they cultivate and prize the understanding, and feel it to be the appointed guardian of goodness, as all wise women should. Without a touch of the Corinna, we feel that neither could ever sink to the level of Priscilla. They are conscious of having a power and place in the world, and they claim it without assumption or affectation, and fill it with a quiet self-respect, not inconsistent with modesty and due humility. Such is the ideal presented, and with such skill that we seem at times to be reading a biography. There is a sweetness in the conception and execution that makes the heart and the temper better as we read. A little gentle monitor puts our pride off its guard, and we are led away captive by goodness — even religious goodness — without resistance.

So much for the *charm* of the books. As a matter of pure judgment, we must place their pictures of American country life and character above all their other merits, since we know not where, in any language, we shall find their graphic truth

excelled. When after times would seek a specimen of our Doric of this date, Aunt Fortune will stand them in stead; and no Theocritus of our time will draw a bucolical swain more true to the life than Mr. Van Brunt. Even the shadow of Didenhover is a portrait; we see him, though he never appears in the flesh, and we feel him, too, though we have never let out a farm "on shares." Captain Montgomery is another of those invisible persons with whom we are perfectly well acquainted, although not a line is given to describing him; and the "hateful" clerk who wreaks his petty spite upon Ellen's horse, is a character whose truth to nature little girls bear witness to, by the hearty indignation with which they read the scene. Nancy Vawse is a white Topsy; Barby a perfect type of the American serving-girl, at once selfish and tender, coarse and delicate; and we might swell our list of life-like characters a good deal further, if their very number did not warn us against being too particular.

But, on the other hand, we are compelled to say that such magisterial lovers as Mr. Carleton and John Humphreys are not at all to our taste, nor do we believe they would in actual presence be very fascinating to most young ladies. It is true that youthful pupils have fallen in love with their schoolmasters ere now, but if we were condemned to go masquerading after a wife, we should, relying upon observation, choose almost any other *rôle* sooner. It is hard to imagine Ellen slipping into the equality of wifedom, from the childish reverence which she is represented as feeling, to the last moment, for him who has been for years her stern and almost gloomy teacher. As for Carleton, he carries his pretentiousness into the region of melodrama — awing people with looks; entering the drawing-rooms of ladies unnoticed, so as to be present when nobody is thinking of him, and scarce descending from his stilts even to his honored mamma, though he is

"All adoration, duty, and observance"

to the child Fleda, and on the point of fighting a duel about her, when she is scarce a dozen years old. This contrast between a man's natural or habitual character and manner, and that which he exhibits when in love, may be what novel-reading young ladies call "interesting;" but it is one scarcely

befitting a pattern man—a Christianized hero—one to whom humility is strength, and self-renunciation the only dignity. The least *souçon* of strut spoils such a figure. We like the hero of Dollars and Cents—evidently a brother of the order, Rodney Collingwood by name—much better, though he walks under such a veil of dimness in the story, as told by a little girl, that we are hardly sure we know him fully.

In each and all of the three books we are thinking of, pecuniary difficulties are made the chief means of the development of character; in real life, as it seems to us, they are more certainly the means of developing talent. Is it not assigning to money an office higher than that which really belongs to it, to make the possession or lack of it so influential in that high region where the affections, the conscience, the hope for another life, are the acknowledged arbiters? Character must spring from the heart; conduct may be, in part, the result of circumstances. The possession of riches does, indeed, sometimes seem to harden the heart and deaden the sympathies; mean and shallow minds it makes self-forgetful and irreligious, sometimes. But, on the other hand, has not the struggle with poverty its mischiefs? Even the effort to escape, not from poverty, but from mediocrity, to the dazzling heights of wealth,—that strife which we of this “happy land” see around us every day,—may well remind a looker-on of the fate of those wretched prisoners, who, after agreeing to march in procession past the only breathing place, that each might have his share of the chance for life, soon forgot, in their frantic selfishness, that the good of all was the good of each, and trod one upon another, filling the air with poison and death. Only the philosopher, and, above all, the Christian, whose philosophy has possession and command of the entire man, heart as well as intellect, finds poverty favorable to the cultivation of all the virtues. Angry discontent, if not open murmuring against Providence; if not absolute and conscious envy, at least so much of it as prevents a hearty rejoicing at the prosperity of others; such a yielding to sordid cares as shall make the imagination a mere caterer to Mammon, and so stifle the affections that our eye shall be evil to the

son of our bosom as being another consumer of the diminishing store; these are some of the too common and natural evils of poverty; evils against which strength of mind offers no adequate defence, because the intellect alone makes poor and wavering battle against the passions and propensities.

Poverty is not, therefore, the ordeal to which we should choose to subject an ordinary mind and heart, with a view to their highest improvement. The trials of temper to which the little Ellen is exposed, under the iron hand of Aunt Fortune, are training indeed, and tests indeed. To profit by such blows, the heart must have had the annealing of heavenly fires, for none other would serve; to bear them without absolute injury would be above the moral strength of most children, as our painful interest in the struggles and slips of the dear little girl bears witness. Another sort of trial is the persecution of Fleda by Mr. Thorn, and the petty annoyance she experiences among the Evelyns. The entire picture of her conduct in these cases is excellently done, and offers some most salutary hints of united modesty and firmness, in positions which most young ladies would find difficult. The amiable amusement called "teazing" is well characterized; we have always felt it to be akin to that of pulling off the legs and wings of flies.

"Fleda had the greatest difficulty not to cry. The lady did not seem to see her disturbed brow; but recovering herself after a little, though not readily, she bent forward and touched her lips to it in kind fashion. Fleda did not look up, and, saying again — 'I will tell him, dear Fleda!' — Mrs. Evelyn left the room. Constance, after a little laughing and condoling, neither of which Fleda attempted to answer, ran off too, to dress herself; and Fleda, after finishing her own toilette, sat down and cried heartily. She thought Mrs. Evelyn had been, perhaps unconsciously, very unkind; and to say that unkindness has not been meant, is but to shift the charge from one to another vital point in the character of a friend, and one perhaps not less grave. A moment's passionate wrong may consist with the endurance of a friendship worth having, better than the thoughtlessness of obtuse wits that can never know how to be kind. Fleda's whole frame was in a tremor from disagreeable excitement, and she had serious causes of sorrow to cry for. She was sorry she had lost what would have been a great pleasure in the ride — and her great pleasures were not often — but

nothing would have been more impossible than for her to go after what Mrs. Evelyn had said; she was sorry Mr. Carleton should have asked her twice in vain; what must he think? She was exceedingly sorry that a thought should have been put into her head that never before had visited the most distant dreams of her imagination — so needlessly, so gratuitously; — she was very sorry, for she could not be free of it again, and she felt it would make her miserably hampered and constrained in mind and manner both, in any future intercourse with the person in question. And then, again, what would he think of that? Poor Fleda came to the conclusion that her best place was at home, and made up her mind to take the first good opportunity of getting there.

“She went down to dinner with no traces either of tears or of unkindness on her sweet face, but her nerves were quivering all the afternoon; she could not tell whether Mrs. Evelyn and her daughters found it out. And it was impossible for her to get back even her old degree of freedom of manner before either Mr. Carleton or Mr. Thorn. All the more because Mrs. Evelyn was every now and then bringing out some sly allusion which afforded herself intense delight, and wrought Fleda to the last degree of unquietness. Unkind — Fleda thought now it was but half from ignorance of the mischief she was doing, the other half from the mere desire of selfish gratification. The times and ways in which Lot and Abraham were walked into the conversation were incalculable — and unintelligible except to the person who understood it only too well.”

Many of the social ills and errors called “petty,” are touched upon with equal acuteness and courage — we say courage, because that is a quality required for touching on American social faults. One is proved a traitor, and will go nigh to be thought one shortly, who allows, even in the rarest paroxysms of candor, that our manners might be improved. But our authoress is on impregnable ground when she takes the golden rule as her standard of manners, and she makes us feel, in various instances, that convention is a far more arbitrary and fluctuating one. As good republicans, we ought to thank her for indicating the basis whereon we may build, even in this land of equality and fluctuation, a politeness more gentle, delicate, and consistent, than ever prevailed in the court of the Grand Monarque, or any other selfish King of Diamonds whatever.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary, after what we have already said, to state formally that we think the new American novels no whit too religious. If we were inclined to cavil at all in this direction, it would be at a too minute and rather feeble mode of presenting the great subject in certain conversations, where the effort has evidently been to simplify the whole matter, and clear it of the mystical dimness and dignity which persons of more intellectual pride than self-knowledge are apt to allege against it. We do not at all agree with the critic who objects to the attempt to "make people religious by quotations from Dr. Watts's hymns;" for a hymn is sometimes to a sermon what the smooth stone of the shepherd-warrior was to the ponderous spear of the heathen giant; or the scymetar of Saladin, that would divide a flying feather, to the broadsword of Sir Kenneth, made to hack and hew by the aid of main strength. "The Word"! who shall measure its potency, or prescribe the vehicle in which it shall find its appointed mark soonest? If any thing is taught equally by Scripture and experience, it is that in spiritual matters it is impossible to say "whether shall prosper, either this or that." To use an illustration called to mind by the rural pictures in the books before us;—a mass of hay not wholly dried may long be conscious of a rising heat, yet never reaching the point of combustion, grow cold again. But, while the temperature of the heap is thus raised, it takes but an electric flash from a passing cloud to wake it into flame. Poetry is electric, and oftentimes the dull, smouldering soul, long inaccessible to influences seeming stronger, finds its tiniest spark irresistible.

We cannot so confidently defend the long arguments which here and there dilute the richer current of natural thought and lively description that flows through Miss Warner's books. We tolerate interruptions to the leading interest only when they are recommended by peculiar felicities of style; importance of subject is not sufficient passport for such interpolations. Nor can we, by any glamour of *bon-homme*, be brought to look with complacency upon certain specimens of homeliness in diction carried further than the necessities of the case demand. Colloquialisms are racy; bad grammar and coarse expressions, however true to nature

in the delineations of certain characters, are sad blemishes when they creep into the writer's own style, or into the talk of people whom she represents as well-educated and accustomed to refined society. An old country gentleman may be made to say, "Suppose you and me was to have some roast apples;" but it grates on the ear sadly when Mr. Rossitur, who has spent his life in Paris and New York, says "I will not interrupt you but a minute," and the heroine herself falls into the same inelegance. Barby may talk of "hauling" a table up to the fire, or a gentleman's "feeling about his jaws and chin," as he stands before the fire; but when the author uses such expressions in her own person, or describes an elegant young lady "reaching over after a sausage," we must be allowed to feel slightly shocked. It is easy to perceive that these errors are the result of a deliberate determination on the author's part, to be true to nature at all hazards; but we submit, that, in fiction, truth must always acknowledge the dominion of taste. There is, indeed, a large class among us, lifted by sudden fortune into positions which render their lack of early advantages painfully obvious; but we protest against the insinuation that it is common to hear, among our better classes, cacophony as salient as Lord Dubuley's, or that English people alone speak correctly our native tongue. There seems a slight lurking of prejudice, hardly consistent with the general patriotism of Miss Warner's books, in this setting up of English people as models of virtue and good-breeding, and almost a solecism in sending across the water for an immensely wealthy English husband for the sturdy little American Fleda, whose breeding of hap and hazard certainly have fitted her so admirably for making some indigenuous swain happy. But this choosing of husbands for themselves, or their heroines, is a matter in which ladies have always the privilege of being a little wilful, if not whimsical.

Where, then, let us ask, in conclusion, shall we class these American novels of ours? There is very little romance about them; they have nothing of the Edgworthian didactic tone; they are not devoted to showing up the vices and weaknesses of society; nor do they take up any particular grievance, in

order to probe the sluggish consciences of those who practise or tolerate it. They have no evident aim at the picturesque or grotesque newness of our green land. May we not, then, consider them as having a character of their own—humane, religious, *piquant*, natural, national? They paint human nature in its American type; they appeal to universal human sympathy, but with a special reference to the fellow-feeling of those whose peculiar social circumstances and trials fit them to be judges of the life-picture in whose background may be discerned so many familiar objects. They recognize the heart as the strong-hold of character, and religion as the ruling element of life; religion—no *ism*, however specious or popular—being “of one mind with Christ;” the “faith that worketh by love;” whose fruit is obedience, and whose reward, a peace that can be attained by no other method. We know of no prototype of such books, unless we venture to claim a family likeness to the world-wide favorite mentioned some time since—a claim, however, which must not imply the relinquishment of that of originality, since there is no room for suspicion of imitation. Nothing could be easier, to be sure, than to show, that, by the side of Goldsmith’s, our author’s literary style is “nowhere,” to use a recently popular phrase; yet we insist there is a resemblance that lies deeper than mere style. Let us hope, that, encouraged in all future efforts by the gratifying welcome accorded to these comparatively crude ventures, she may catch the style, as well as the spirit, of the great master of English prose narrative.

To us, there is something very pleasing in this welcome. Such a spontaneous popularity is interesting as an index of national character. Not that we would draw too broad conclusions from a single instance, but that we must consider so striking a fact to have some general meaning. When a story of real life—American rural life, of the homeliest—unheralded at home, unstamped by foreign approval—lacking the tempting bait of national flattery—and wholly deficient in the flash and flippancy that might attract the vulgar mind, springs at once to a currency which few books ever reach—cried to the skies by the “most sweet voices,” of old and young, gentle and simple,—we cannot help feeling the verdict to be significant.

To borrow a Swedenborgianism, we are what our loves are; and, although nations are perhaps as subject as individuals to be led away by clamor or sympathy into demonstrations of that which has no true vitality, there are expressions whose heartiness is their warrant. What are the grounds of the admiration, or rather love, excited by these books? The interest of both lies in a most life-like picture of the character and fate of a little girl—for we feel Ellen and Fleda to be one and the same;—a little girl such as any of our daughters may be; unfortunate in some respects, happy in others; dependent, as all little girls, whatever their station or fortune, must be, on the virtue and affection of those about them; but showing, what all little girls cannot show, a degree of character, a firmness of principle, a sweetness of disposition, by no means impossible under the circumstances, yet far enough raised above common experience and expectation, to excite the imagination and stimulate the sympathy. This little figure, set in a frame-work of homely circumstances, coarse dress, domestic drudgery, and uncongenial companionship, is the light of the book. All else, however excellently sketched in, is subordinate. It is of the little heart, beating at once with timidity and courage, that we think. The sweet childish face and loving ways make “a sunshine in the shady place,” under the most humiliating circumstances. We care for all else only as this little piece of tender, budding womanhood is affected or influenced. When she is abused, we burn with indignation; when she is exalted, we feel that only justice is done her. When saucy and teasing things are said to her by envious people, we long to hear what she will say in reply, and when she answers well, (as she always does,) our eyes sparkle as if she were our very own. From all this, we cannot help coming to the conclusion that the author is very able, and that we are—very amiable! And in this comfortable frame of mind, we take our leave for the present.